

ODDS: REFLECTIONS AND DIRECTIONS:

A THEMATIC STUDY OF FOUR PLAYS BY SAMUEL BECKETT

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The thesis makes a thematic study of Odds, by Samuel Beckett - consisting of Theatre I (1956), Theatre II (1958), Radio I (1961) and Radio II (1962). All were unpublished until 1973 or later.

Concentrating on the plays written between 1948 and 1963, Chapter One briefly presents the major themes of Beckett's drama. Chapter Two places Theatre I and II within the thematic progression revealed by the first chapter. After more detailed treatment of Beckett's use of the radio medium, Chapter Three examines Radio I and II. It locates their chronological and thematic position among the radio plays, and uses them to reinforce claims made concerning the particular thematic developments that have taken place during the growth of Beckett's radio drama. The thesis concludes with a short discussion of the highly derivative nature of some among the four plays, and suggests reasons for their not having been published until recently.

The thesis shows how the transition from the prose writings of the 1940's to the stage plays of the 1950's led to works whose major concern was the general human condition, presented in a more obviously external frame of reference, within the plays. The stage plays Theatre I and II are examined in close conjunction with two of the major works of the decade - Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape. Discussion of all the radio plays, including Radio I and II and Chapter Three shows how through the radio medium Beckett returned to the internalized universe and artistic concerns of the prose written prior to 1950, but in an effectively dramatized form.

Overall, the examination of these little-known plays, in the context of general thematic development in Beckett's drama, provides particular insight into the different thematic possibilities of differing genres and media in Beckett's work.

INTRODUCTION

When a writer publishes previously unknown material long after its composition, the opportunity for a new understanding of his work, in the light of this material, can be more significant than study of the newly published material alone.

When the writer is Samuel Beckett, whose works form, thematically, one of the most consistent and inter-related groups of poems, prose works and plays in modern literature, the importance of such comparative study is undeniable. Moreover, when the newly published material dates from a time of significant development in Beckett's use of different genres and in his concentration upon the figure of the creative artist, we may fairly expect to learn a great deal by examining the new material in the context of the works composed before and after it.

The object of this thesis is to carry out such an examination on "Odds," a group of four short plays for theatre and radio, dating from 1956 to 1962, which were published, together with more recent works, in Ends and Odds in 1977.

It is impossible in a thesis of this length to do justice to the ideas of Samuel Beckett and their formulation in his work, so my treatment of themes is necessarily incomplete, and I have dealt only with those aspects of Beckett's prose writing that seemed to bear direct relation to the plays. Chapter One briefly presents and discusses the major thematic concerns of Beckett's dramatic writing during the transition from highly introverted prose to

more objective (and accessible) early stage plays. It then follows the development of these ideas into a new medium of radio drama, entailing a return to subjectivity, and indicates the thematic direction taken by the radio plays and later stage plays, in conjunction with later prose writing.

Using the framework of ideas and development obtained in Chapter One, the second chapter examines Theatre I and Theatre II. These two plays reflect very closely the themes and methods of dramatic exploration found in the stage plays of this period (i.e. 1956-1958). Theatre II in particular extends considerably some of the ideas behind Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape.

My justification for dividing the stage and radio plays in my discussion is that the primary concern of the radio plays is artistic theory, and the condition of the artist's mind, whereas the stage plays concentrate more on the external human condition. Between 1958 and 1961 significant developments took place in Beckett's writing, mainly in the field of radio drama, that led to this divergence.

Chapter Three begins with a discussion of how Beckett uses the radio medium in the plays from All That Fall to Cascando. Then the relationship - both derivative and prefigurative - that Radio I bears to these, is examined. Finally, Radio II is discussed in some detail. It almost certainly post-dates Cascando, and it presents some interesting departures from what Words and Music, Radio I and Cascando might have led us to expect in the way of structural and thematic complexity. It also dramatises

the processes and struggles of the creative mind more extensively than any other of the radio plays.

Attention to the relationship each of these four "odds" bears to the work surrounding it, assists me to draw some conclusions about the development of themes in Beckett's drama, the influence of different media on his treatment of those themes, and the probable reasons why Beckett did not seek publication of the plays in "Odds" for such a long time after they were written.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

(showing important dates of composition or publishing of Beckett's writings up to 1965).

- 1938: Published Murphy, his first novel.
- 1942: Began Watt.
- 1945: Finished Watt.
- 1946: Began Mercier et Camier and Nouvelles.
- 1947: Finished Mercier et Camier and Nouvelles. Wrote Eleutheria and Molloy. Began Malone Meurt.
- 1948: Finished Malone Meurt. Began En Attendant Godot.
- 1949: Finished En Attendant Godot. Began L'Innommable.
- 1950: Finished L'Innommable. Began Textes Pour Rien.
- 1951: Continued Textes Pour Rien.
- 1952: Finished Textes Pour Rien.
- 1953-4: Worked on possible beginnings of Fin de Partie.
- 1955: Began Fin de Partie-proper in December.
- 1956: Finished Fin de Partie. Wrote All That Fall, Acte sans Paroles I and II, and The Gloaming (in English) in December.
- 1957: Translated Fin de Partie into English, changing it substantially.
- 1958: Wrote Krapp's Last Tape and Theatre 2 (in French).
- 1959: Wrote Embers.
- 1960: Wrote Comment C'est. Began Happy Days.
- 1961: Finished Happy Days. Wrote Words and Music and Esquisse Radiophonique. Began Cascando.
- 1962: Finished Cascando. Wrote Pochade Radiophonique. Began Play.
- 1963: Finished Play. Wrote Film scenario.
- 1964:
- 1965: Wrote Eh Joe and Come and Go.

AN OUTLINE OF THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN
BECKETTS WRITING FOR STAGE AND RADIO

In her biography of Samuel Beckett, Deirdre Bair claims that Beckett turned to the medium of the stage in Waiting for Godot, "to escape the impasse of self-confrontation and revelation into which his novels had led him."¹ The last novel of Beckett's trilogy, The Unnamable, is really, according to Bair, about the "obsessive-compulsive need for words,"² and ends in what Beckett called "complete disintegration."³ After this novel, Beckett wrote only plays and Textes pour rien until 1960, when he managed what A. and K. Hamilton called an "artistic breakthrough"⁴ into prose writing that dealt primarily with the artist's creativity. We can see the change prepared for in the plays written in that decade, particularly in the radio plays where the internal, subjective world of pure sound, with its evident links between being and perception, lends itself to the depicting of an internal universe of split faculties and functional characters.

Before enlarging on this development, I wish to deal with the transition from the prose trilogy to

¹ Bair, p 383.

² Ibid, p 400.

³ Ibid.

⁴ A. and K. Hamilton, p 3.

the first stage plays. While The Unnamable was a highly subjective work, Endgame was written "during a period of cerebral exteriorization."⁵ Bair points out that in the first stage of Fin de Partie, action had precedence over the language and ideas,⁶ and that in writing a play, Beckett went through the process of placing himself inside the characters, then, as creator, trying to keep an objective distance, and visualizing word and movement from the audience's viewpoint.⁷ The development is carried further after Play, according to Bair, when Beckett is "no longer concerned with a peripatetic being compelled to wander on a relentless search for the self."⁸ After this, in her view, the hero, or voice, is usually fixed, concentrating on a past (usually fluid), a present (usually confined) and a future (usually horrible to contemplate).⁸ In fact, the journeys cease and the state of immobile contemplation begins much earlier, in Fin de Partie, Krapp's Last Tape and Embers. Even Beckett's first published play, Waiting for Godot, concentrates on characters who are not searching, but in a static situation, awaiting a future event. The play is concerned with their condition of waiting, with their level of awareness during this period, and with their means of enduring both

⁵ Bair, p 402.

⁶ Ibid, p 462-463.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p 577.

the waiting and the awareness. Ruby Cohn claims that the primary question in Godot is "do we wait to be damned or saved?"⁹ In other words, do we commit ourselves to hope or despair? Vladimir and Estragon seem, in the end, incapable of forsaking hope.

A brief discussion of the situation in Godot will clarify some of the play's central concerns. Vladimir and Estragon are expiating some obscure sin, for which they suspect they ought to repent.

Vladimir: Suppose we repented.

Estragon: Repented what? [...] Our
being born?^{12a}

Having begun life, the two are doomed to wait, to endure the passing of time, until life ends, and as the last lines of "Dante and the Lobster" have it: "It is not [a quick death]."¹⁰

According to Bair, Beckett has said that the sprouting leaves in the second act of Godot are there merely to show the passage of time, not as a sign of hope.¹¹ Moreover, Beckett's essay on Proust claims that man's subjection to continuous change in Time means that desire is by definition insatiable.¹²

If Vladimir's and Estragon's hope in the future is misplaced, their understanding of the present is on

⁹ Cohn, "Outward Bound Soliloquies" p 17-38.

¹⁰ Beckett, More Kicks than Pricks.

¹¹ Bair, p 383.

¹² Beckett, Proust, p 3.

^{12a} Waiting for Godot p 8. Beckett English references throughout are to the Grove Press edition of Beckett's works, except in the case of Endgame, where references are to the first Faber edition of the play.

even shakier ground. It costs them immense effort to pass the time in a tolerable manner, and their uncertainty is shown in the confused or doubting references to past and present occurrences, the day of the week, and even the time of day.^{12b}

This uncertainty contrasts oddly with Pozzo's obsession with precise time-keeping,^{12c} but is reflected in the setting and time of day - the grey, indistinct half-light of dusk. Beckett's debt to Dante's images of hell, Purgatory and Paradise is well known, but it is worthwhile to note that Dante's Purgatory was one of everlasting monotony, contrasting with a Paradise of eternal progress and ascent from one state of knowledge and blessedness to another. Vladimir and Estragon certainly fluctuate in awareness of their hopeless condition, but they make no overall progress, and end in exactly the impasse in which they began. They are aware of the void of non-existence around them - "In an instant we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!"^{12d} yet can neither endure it nor successfully fend it off.

The sufferers in Endgame experience an even greater tension. For them, there is no possibility of the arrival of a "Godot" figure. Outside of their refuge, "it's death,"^{12e} "corpsed,"^{12f} and "zero,"^{12g}

All their attention rests on the prospect of ending, being able to leave or die. Although they are

^{12b} Waiting for Godot p10 and p55. ^{12e} Endgame p9.

^{12c} Waiting for Godot p16, ^{12f} Endgame p30.

^{12d} Waiting for Godot p52. ^{12g} Endgame p29.

taking refuge from the emptiness outside, they are desperate to end their existence and achieve the condition of nothingness. The play's tension arises out of the conflict between this desire, and the fear, or instinct for self-preservation,¹³ that leads them to life-sustaining devices such as food. The conflict is summed up perfectly in Clov's statement : "If I don't kill that rat, he'll die."^{13a} The approaching end brings heightened awareness and frenzied questions, answered unhelpfully by the remark "Something is taking its course."^{14a} Fewer and fewer material objects (such as painkillers, paper or bicycles) are left to distract their attention. Their decayed physical condition (outward sign of inward collapse) grows steadily worse, or so we learn from their comments.

The desire for death or ending, and the senseless need to go on living, writing (in the novels), or narrating (in the plays), collide throughout Beckett's work in a process of endless deterioration. In the plays this is emphasised by circular plots, which return characters to their original position, each time in a worse state of deprivation. In the first English production of Play, Beckett initially considered weakening the second run-through to indicate decay.¹⁴

^{13a} Endgame p44.

¹³ Beckett, Proust, p 11.

¹⁴ Bair, p 567.

^{14a} Endgame p17 and p26.

In the 'later plays, especially the radio plays, the characters' inability to end is explicit rather than implied. Voice and Opener in Cascando are clearly desperate in the face of their obligation to continue:

Opener: I'm afraid to open.

But I must open.

So I open. [...]

(with voice) Come on! Come on! ^{14b}

Even in Godot, however, the hope of ending is firmly demolished along with trust in salvation, the Christian mythology and God's dubious mercy. As Estragon himself admits, "People are bloody ignorant apes." ^{14c} Lucky's speech, the fruitless attempts to make contact with the Almighty in Endgame, the Rooneys' wild laughter in All that Fall, ^{14d} Winnie's religious platitudes in Happy Days and the pious refrains in Come and Go, all say or ironically imply the same thing.

In Godot, Vladimir and Estragon have abandoned their free will and understanding for groundless hope in the future. They are open to persuasive deception by Pozzo, ^{14e} each other and themselves. After repeated disappointment, they arrive at apathetic indifference and immobility. Their condition is like that of the man in Act Without Words 1, which Beckett called "this last extremity of human meat - or bones -

^{14b} Cascando p16-17.

^{14c} Waiting for Godot p9.

^{14d} All That Fall p88.

^{14e} Waiting for Godot p19.

[...] Clov [...], gone from refuge.¹⁵

The way in which Beckettian characters in Godot bind themselves to an endless repetition of meaningless acts, to stave off contemplation and acceptance of their irredeemable condition, is best understood in the context of Beckett's essay on Proust. Habit "is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment" (p 7), "a perpetual adjustment and re-adjustment of our organic sensibilities to the conditions of its worlds" (p 16). While subject to habit, man does not perceive the real world, referred to as the "essence - the idea" (p 11), but an object distorted "in the haze of conception-preconception" (p 11). Normally, this anaesthetizing distortion is successfully carried out. "Suffering represents the omission of that duty, whether through negligence or inefficiency, and boredom its adequate performance [...] Suffering - that opens a window on experience, and Boredom [...] that must be considered as the most tolerable because [it is] the most durable of human evils." (p 16)

Beckett's characters seek the deadening boredom of habit, rather than the painful realization of exist-

¹⁵ Letter to Beckett's publisher, quoted in the front of Zilliacus' book Beckett and Broadcasting.

ence. Copeland claims that "the artist-hero prefers the pain of lucidity to the illusory comfort of wilful blindness." I do not think that he prefers it; he is compelled to experience this pain and lucidity in spite of determined efforts to escape it, whether by sleep, drink, sensual memories, or attempts to remove the agony from himself by the use of third person objective narrative.

Central to Beckett's plays is the pathetic image of the human being trying to erect the barrier of habit between himself and the real world. The plays show us this barrier ruthlessly torn away to expose the hero to painful consciousness of his situation and perception of "the real". As I shall show in the following chapter, Theatre I is a particularly clear illustration of this theme.

Defensive habits take many forms. Ritualised speech and action such as the antiphonal passages of Godot, or Winnie's repetitive acts in Happy Days, are common. Characters try desperately to locate familiar physical surroundings and limits, and to remain within them. In Endgame Clov and Hamm demonstrate this by meticulous attention to details of measurement. Clov longs for his exactly-measured, neatly confining kitchen, and Hamm is obsessed with being in the exact centre of the room, able to locate the encircling walls. He punctuates dialogue and narrative with questions and

statements about the environment. They both need to establish and remain within the boundaries that Habit has made tolerable.

Pozzo, Hamm, Krapp and Winnie perform rituals of comfort and self-indulgence with atomizers, pain-killers, alcohol and lipstick, but as Beckett's work develops, the characters are left with less and less of the "extraneous paraphernalia that makes life bearable,"¹⁶ and are reduced to a state of pure unendurable consciousness of their plight.

For Pozzo, Hamm and Dan Rooney, the loss of one sense represents a further step in their subjection to Habit, since it is by the senses that involuntary memory ¹⁷ is stimulated, to bring about real perception and the suffering of being. The mind would like to be closed to the world, but "the senses let the world in like a frost."^{18a}

When it can no longer be avoided, admission of the real world leads to what Alvarez calls the "final shocked affirmation of pain,"¹⁸ a moment when the suffering of being pierces habit-bound complacency. These moments are given painful utterance: "What's happening?"^{18b} cries Hamm; "I can't go on!"^{18c} cries Vladimir. Speech as a response to torture becomes a metaphor for artistic express-

¹⁶ Copeland, p 24.

¹⁷ For a definition of voluntary and involuntary memory see Proust, p 20.

¹⁸ Alvarez, p 29.

^{18a} Proust p47.

^{18b} Endgame p17 and p26.

^{18c} Waiting for Godot p56.

ion, Beckett's earlier plays show the painful futility of the human condition, most harshly depicted in Endgame, where progress, logic, nature, love and happiness are all shown to be impossible;¹⁹ Nell and Nagg cannot reach to kiss each other. From Play onwards, however, Beckett puts more emphasis on the painful futility of the artist's attempt to locate and express his condition in narrative or poetic form.. Throughout, characters' utterances are both an attempt to conceal these ugly truths, and a horrified acknowledgement of them.

The definitive image in the earlier plays is "birth astride of a grave."^{20a} Little says that "birth for [Beckett] is the one unacceptable experience."²⁰ Birth, in Vladimir's words, is "difficult,"^{20a} and life is brief and painful. Hence, the introduction of a child, or references to female sexuality near the end of so many plays, is both threatening and ironic. Like the man in Act Without Words I, all the characters are unwilling to be born. Once born, and paying for it, they fear any prospect of continuing procreation, even in the guise of a flea.

Their bleak outlook is reflected in the stage settings, where "arid landscapes dramatise the boredom

¹⁹Bedient, p 146.

²⁰Little, p 52.

^{20a} Waiting for Godot p58.

and futility of existence."²¹ Structural symmetry only serves to emphasize the emptiness of the exchanges and actions taking place within it. Copeland points out that after Endgame the dramatic structure is reduced continuously²² (though of course, there is still a complex "play" metaphor in Play, where the audience sits behind a probing spotlight compelling the actors to speak their lines). It reaches a point where the plays are little more than dramatized monologues. In the radio and later stage plays, the relationship of these "monodramas"²³ to the monologues of Beckett's earlier prose is evident. The anguish of expression and creation, and the increasingly-felt obligation to express and create, which are such major concerns in the prose, are not at first as clear in the less subjective stage plays, until they are brought to the fore in the radio plays. Here, Beckett can return to a narrative-type exploration of themes, in a medium that allows the closest possible approximation to "actorless plays". "For Beckett, the perfect stage vehicle is one in which there are no actors or directors, only the play itself,"²⁴ and obviously, once a radio play is recorded, it is not open to the fluctuations of stage performances.

²¹ Copeland p 47.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Monodramas" is a term used by A. Parkin in "Monologue into Monodrama".

²⁴ Bair, p 513.

However, before examining artistic communication, I wish to enlarge upon human communication in the plays.

Far from being able to communicate successfully with their fellow-men, Beckett's characters cannot even control their own bodies efficiently. The Cartesian division of mind and body is shown by lack of physical co-ordination, non-performance of actions dictated by the will (as in Godot), and vain commands issued to subordinate characters, faculties or figments of the imagination (as in the radio plays). One of Beckett's most recent works for the stage, Not I, illustrates a complete breakdown between mind and body, with an almost totally disembodied voice explicitly referring to the unresponding body as a machine. As the plays progress, their characters approach a state of immobility and impotence. They resemble the prose heroes of The Unnamable and How It Is.

Inability to communicate, like all the dramatic themes I have mentioned so far, generally emerges as an aspect of the relationship between two figures such as Hamm and Clov, Pozzo and Lucky, or Winnie and Willie. The relationships are in part a struggle for power and identity, and characteristically involve command, conflict, cruelty, interdependence, recognition and acknowledgment. The pairs resemble master and slave, sadist and victim, father and son, and friends. They are used to

explore both human relationships (thereby illuminating the needs and nature of human beings), and the relationships existing between different faculties of the artist's divided mind. The pairs require company to protect them against solitude and silence, and to reassure them of their existence and identity (by the "esse est percipi" dictum). Later works, such as Play and Film, are more emphatic about the horror of being perceived and therefore forced to continue existence, whereas earlier plays, such as Godot, Endgame, and All that Fall, concentrate on the need to be perceived in order to exist.

Cruelty is practised by one character on another to force awareness of their joint situation. This was Hamm's conscious aim in his treatment of the beggar. It is a more subtle expression of the theory so bluntly presented in How It Is, where pairs meet and part to torture and be tortured. The need to suffer and make others suffer in perceiving reality is countered by the need for affection, warmth and reassurance, expressed most commonly in the plays by the stylized plea "Forgive me". The plea is usually met coldly, and the embraces of Vladimir and Estragon end in recoil and offended nostrils, yet the characters remain dependent on each other, and unable to part.

They supplement dependence by indulgence in clownish humour, involving everything from banana skin

catastrophes and stepladders to bawdy jokes, ironic wit and highflown nonsense such as Lucky's speech. Amid the fracas in the final stages of this speech, we learn that in spite of all the efforts to the contrary- all the tennis- man is wasting and pining. ^{24a}

Beckett indicates in Proust that the breaking down of these defences against consciousness of solitude and despair is a necessary process for the artist.

Friendship, according to Proust, is the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned. ^{24b}

But :

For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is not only reasonable, but a necessity. ^{24b}

In other words, attempts to relate to fellow human beings are yet another effort to escape the "suffering of being" that comes with genuine artistic awareness, and retain the normal "aesthetic experience [which] consists in a series of identifications." ^{24c}

As we have seen, characters in succeeding plays have fewer and fewer resources with which to carry out this retreat. For Winnie, "there is my story of course, when all else fails." ^{24d}

Escape from awareness through words and fictional

^{24a} Waiting for Godot p29.

^{24b} Proust p46.

^{24c} Proust p11.

^{24d} Happy Days p54.

narrative serves many purposes. Vladimir and Estragon try to fill the silence that would otherwise be occupied by thought. For Hamm, Winnie and Henry (in Embers), speech requires a listener; when one is available, the speaker is perceived and thereby gains the conviction of existence. As Copeland points out regarding the radio plays, "in those works which are meant to be perceived through the ear alone, the vital link between speaking and being is evident."²⁵

Eventually, as the pairs disintegrate into isolated, often aged and incapacitated narrators, each character becomes like the Unnamable, "a mere self, a voice prattling in the void."²⁶ His existence is, like Worm's, only as it is conceived by others. The Unnamable "has brooded so long on himself that he has turned into an object of contemplation himself."²⁷ Vladimir²⁸ and Winnie²⁹ sense the same thing happening to them. According to Levy, The Unnamable disowns and becomes a spectator of his own suffering, hoping to become an unconscious witness of his own existence.³⁰ The same intention is almost, but never quite, fulfilled in Cascando. Third-person narrative reaches its most transparent as a means of escape in

²⁵ Copeland p 136.

²⁶ Levy, "Existence searching essence," p 104.

²⁷ Ibid p 105.

²⁸ Godot, p 58.

²⁹ Happy Days, p 40.

³⁰ Levy, "Existence searching essence," p 110.

Not I. There, and in the radio plays, self-consciousness is all that remains to the speaker. That cannot cease as the mind will not. "If the mind were to go. (Pause.) It won't, of course. (Pause.) Not quite. (Pause.) Not mine."^{30a} "How the mind works still to be sure,"^{30b} As in the prose works, the mind "ceases to be a place to retire into and enjoy, as Murphy finds it, and becomes, first of all a useless apparatus for meaningless calculations [the sucking stones incident] and then a hell where a voice goes on speaking worthless words."³¹

When this point is reached, consciousness "becomes the object of its own intense activity."³² Copeland describes this intense activity as follows:

When self perception remains the only activity possible for consciousness, the voice requires the endless retelling of the self's own story, the endless reflection of the self's circumscribed condition.³²

Consciousness of self is as painful as any other form of consciousness; O demonstrates this convincingly in Film. Beckett himself points out that if one adopted the "esse est percipi" dictum in the first place:

All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.

^{30a} Happy Days p52.

³¹ Robinson, p 258.

^{30b} Play p56.

³² Copeland, p 140.

Search of non-being in flight from
extraneous perception breaking down
in inescapability of self-perception. 32a

Copeland appears to grant little importance to
Beckett's following statement:

No truth value attaches to above,
regarded as of merely structural and
dramatic convenience. 32a

The stage or radio hero who seeks a silent,
unperceived extinction, has to exhaust his own story to
achieve self-annihilation, to be "in atoms." 32b

He struggles towards a passive state,
frequently that of burial in the earth. The sucking,
staunching or extinguishing function, ~~is~~ performed by the
earth in Happy Days, is fulfilled by Hamm's handkerchief
in Endgame. The earth is called "you old extinguisher," 32c

while the handkerchief is referred to
in the last lines of Endgame as "old stancher".

Ironically, however, Winnie feels that she is being
sucked upwards, into the glaring blue sky, whereas Willie
is obviously trying to burrow into a hole, away from the
sun. Winnie demonstrates the ambiguity or duality of the
impulses to which Beckett's characters are subject. The
dark earth is a symbol of unattainable, passive
unconsciousness, an escape from the dreadful light of
consciousness, as well as a representation of the worm-

32a Film p75.

32b All That Fall p43.

32c Happy Days p37.

level of existence³³ which the artist must consciously choose in preference to the rationally perceived surface of things. In Beckett's view, "the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent."^{34a}

The artist's impulse for Beckett, then, is downwards, or inwards, spurred on not by rationally-controlled voluntary memory, but by involuntary memory. This impulse was recognised by the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp in Krapp's Last Tape, and the tension between rational light as a compelling force and irrational dark as an object of yearning, is central to the play. According to Knowlson, old Krapp has been striving to subjugate the irrational elements of storm and night in his life and work, and be guided by the light of rational understanding.³⁴ This distinction is also important in Embers as a feature of Bolton's story, where Holloway is a visitor from the light; he meets Bolton in the near-dark, illuminated by flashes of light from the pulled curtain.

Intense light features in the stage directions of Act Without Words I ("Desert. Dazzling light"^{34b}), Happy Days ("Expanse of scorched grass...Blazing light"^{34c}) and Act Without Words II ("stage, violently lit"^{34d}). In Pozzo's

³³ Godot p 39.

³⁴ Knowlson p 61.

^{34a} Proust p48.

^{34b} Act Without Words I p125.

^{34c} Happy Days p7.

^{34d} Act Without Words II p137.

conception of life, as birth astride of a grave, "the light gleams an instant, . . . then it's night once more."^{34e}

(Godot p 57). Play's single technical device is the consciousness-rousing spotlight which the characters long to escape. Even the woman in Not I experiences a relentless beam of light in conjunction with the buzzing in her head. J. R. Moore says that the light "by its glaring vacancy compels human thought to fill the void."³⁵ Copeland describes light as the eyes "of the anonymous observers,"³⁶ focussed upon the inner being where all one's deepest sufferings can be discovered. The sensory eye needs the light, but in Beckett's plays the imaginative light needs the dark. According to Harvey, Beckett said that when he sat down to write, he waited "to descend into the darkness."^{37a} Imaginative activity requires the denial of rational perception. Adherence to the latter entails, as Krapp discovered, loss of the world of experience and response, with no compensation in terms of artistic fulfillment. Krapp has "betrayed his artistic calling"³⁷ by struggling to deny darkness, and remain in the light. He can listen to a recording of the time when he realized the direction his art had to take, yet can say " the new light above my table is a

^{34e} Waiting for Godot p57.

³⁵ Moore, "Some night thoughts," The Massachusetts Review 8 : 537, Quoted in Copeland, p 130.

³⁶ Copeland, p 130.

³⁷ Ibid

^{37a} Harvey, Samuel Beckett, Poet and Critic, p242.

great improvement." ³⁸

In Beckett's first published novel, Murphy, we find an explicit statement of the distinction later conveyed by these metaphors of light and darkness. In conversation with Murphy, Neary (who attempts to formulate his experience systematically) observes:

"Murphy, all life is figure and ground."

"But a wandering to find home," said Murphy.

"The face," said Neary, "or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion. I think of Mrs Dwyer." ^{38a}

Neary's view is not endorsed by what follows, for Murphy reaches "home" by the "short circuit" of love requited. ³⁹ The "glare" is "extinguished" and experience beyond any intellectual capability is achieved.

Life is not "figure and ground," and nor is the world of Beckett's dramatic writing. For a complete appreciation and understanding of the plays, we must consider both the exterior world of the human condition and the interior world of the artist's consciousness and imagination. The first, the exterior world, has been

³⁸ Krapp's Last Tape p17.

^{38a} Murphy p7.

³⁹ Murphy, p 24.

covered in the discussion of the themes of Habit and Suffering. The interior world, as hinted already in this chapter, is closely bound to the thematic images of light and dark, and the relationship between being and perception.

Above all, it is represented by the inner voices that we find throughout Beckett's work, even in the early Mercier and Camier.⁴⁰ Winnie's head was always full of faint, confused cries. Vladimir and Estragon hear "all the dead voices," sounding "like feathers," "like ashes," "like leaves."^{40a} The voice is most powerful in Eh Joe, where it acts with disintegrating force on the hearer. The voices bring the characters to awareness, suffering and creative activity. Like the sea sounds, the lights, the bells and the other goads that act upon Beckett's characters, the voice functions without the will of the speaker or hearer. Artistic consciousness raised by involuntary memory of some other stimulus, and reason, as we saw in discussion of Krapp's Last Tape, merely obstructs it. The creative activity that follows true awareness, taking the form of spoken or written narration, is likewise not a product of the rational mind. Beckett wrote to Bob Thomson in 1962:

⁴⁰ Copeland, pp 123-4 .

^{40a} Waiting for Godot p43.

In my case, I write because I have to -
I don't mean for money - but for my own
needs. I don't know where the writing
comes from and I am often quite surprised
when I see what I have committed to
paper.⁴¹

So then, "the inner voice evidence of consciousness,
compels the outer voice, sign of life,"⁴² and the end
of one comes only with the end of the other.

A. and K. Hamilton consider that in presenting the
theme of the artist's obligation to express, How It Is
(originally written in French in 1960) "delineates the
world of the artistic imagination,"⁴³ or at least such a
supposition "opens up much in the text that otherwise
seems obscure."⁴⁴ They see the surface scenery, which
is present in the trilogy and Godot, stripped away to
leave bare the underlying layer of "muck" in How It Is.⁴⁵
There, the Unnamable's "irrepressible tendency towards
mechanized and unconscious movement"⁴⁶ both indicates the
force of habit and helps to characterize him as the sum
of functions and faculties. Hence a gradual change in

⁴¹Bair, p 556.

⁴²Copeland, p 136.

⁴³A. & K. Hamilton, p 2.

⁴⁴Ibid ,

⁴⁵Ibid, p 34.

⁴⁶Copeland, P 111 ,

focus occurs from Godot, through Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape, to radio plays like Embers. It represents an increasing concern with the processes of the artist's mind, as well as growing concentration on the most universally unpleasant aspects of the human condition, and a closer confrontation with them.

Both levels of existence - the external human condition and the internal mental condition - are always hinted at, and neither can be ignored by audience or critic, particularly when we approach such an ambiguous work as Endgame. Mayoux notes that Hamm's "brain-grey"⁴⁷ room in Endgame is even more definitely an internal landscape than Waiting for Godot. Everything, bicycles, pap, nature (at least in the vicinity), tides and coffins, runs out as Hamm's life bleeds away.⁴⁸ Hamm's description of the painter who saw only ashes from his window reflects on his own perception of the world outside his refuge, so that the universe of Endgame is in part an expressionistic one.

Little sees Hamm and Clov as a couple made up of "a creative part, the mind [and] a part which ensures day to day existence."⁴⁹ In many of the plays, the word "creature" is used by a character of his subordinates, or of others who appear to have less command of the

⁴⁷ Mayoux, p 31.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Little, p 47.

situation than himself. For example it is used by W_1 of W_2 and M. The word reflects ironically on those who use it, since rarely are they fully aware of their own unenviable position. It also illustrates "that obsession with art, as both creative act and created art"⁵⁰ [...] in Beckett's works."⁵¹ In effect we are told, "the Beckettian narrator (or actor) underlines in his art the very aspect that traditional novelists (and playwrights) seek most diligently to efface from their work - the process of fabrication."⁵² Consciousness of the play as a play, and of the author behind the work, is evident even in Eleutheria.⁵³ In the radio plays it develops into intense consciousness of the process of story-telling by manipulating internal mental faculties.

Moreover, for Beckett, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the artist must direct his energies inwards rather than outwards. The Unnamable admits that he should have spoken of himself alone, yet fears to get out of his depth by using the first person. Like so many of Beckett's characters - Hamm, Winnie, Henry and the woman in Not I - he tries to escape and at the same time express his own suffering "by attributing it to

⁵⁰ Copeland's emphasis.

⁵¹ Copeland, p 17.

⁵² Ibid, p 18.

⁵³ Ibid, p 47.

a fictional creation."⁵⁴ But the "author-hero finds [...] that his creatures, though meant to aid him in his search, only stand in his way or divert him from his purpose."⁵⁶ Concentration on a figure outside himself acts like friendship and obstructs the artist's awareness and performance.

According to Beckett,

art comes from the abandonment of the macrocosm for the pursuit of the microcosm. Man is doomed to failure, for he can never commit or abandon himself completely to his inner voice.⁵⁶

Like Vladimir and Estragon, he fears the void that lies within and around him, and will never "cast[...] the last veil"⁵⁷ separating him from true reality. The process is "un dévoilement sans fin, voile derrière voile, plan sur plan de transparences imparfaites, un dévoilement vers l'indévoilable, le rien, la chose à nouveau."⁵⁸

In Play, one of the women suggests "Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow

⁵⁴ Zeitman, p 42.

⁵⁵ Copeland, p 192.

⁵⁶ Bair, p 294. Bair draws this view from Beckett's "Les Deux Besoins", an unpublished article (written 1938-9 or 1942) on the nature of art and its function. Ref. Federman and Fletcher, 612.

⁵⁷ Copeland, p 174.

⁵⁸ "Peintres de L'Empêchement" by Samuel Beckett, p 7, quoted in Copeland, p 177.

I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth?"^{58a} But the struggle for what Copeland calls "self-coincidence,"⁵⁹ the true telling of the self's own story, is without end. The very words on which the artist subsists distort his perception and make accurate expression impossible. As Knapp phrases it, the characters are "condemned to speak about the silence so long as there is breath, while their words separate them from that dumb essence [...]" which speaking is supposed to manifest. And at the same time, that essence is something to be kept at bay: words are a refuge, but simultaneously a torment."⁶⁰

The failure of words to approach reality leads to epistemological uncertainty and dissatisfaction when characters use language to describe colours, plants, animals, feelings, the time of day or life itself:^{60a}

"life ... yes, Life I suppose, there is no other word."

The thematic development that took place in Beckett's dramatic writing from 1948 onwards was caused in some sense by an impulse opposite to that which lead him out of progressively more introverted prose writing to the more external world of the stage plays. The themes of suffering existence made bearable only by the deadening action of Habit, external perception and

^{58a} Play p54.

⁵⁹ Copeland, p 182.

⁶⁰ Knapp, p 78.

^{60a} Happy Days p28.

and consciousness, fear of silence and void, and desire to end, are given new direction - internalized - in the radio drama. The radio medium, as we shall see in Chapter Three, allows a return to the interior world familiar from the novels, with new emphasis on the divisions in the artist's mind, and the bonds and barriers between perception and real existence.

CHAPTER TWO

THEATRE I AND THEATRE II

The first version of Theatre I was an English text, titled The Gloaming, written in December 1956. That is, it was written just after Fin de Partie, Actes Sans Paroles I and II and All That Fall. A French version was first published in Minuit 3 (March, 1974) pp 65-72, titled Fragment de Theatre. Theatre I, the text found in Ends and Odds, is a translation of the Fragment, rather than a version of The Gloaming, and is not changed at all.

Given the time when this play was written, it is hardly surprising that in Theatre I we find two decrepit characters whose environment, physical characteristics, relationship, fluctuating awareness of reality and attempts to escape suffering are all very reminiscent of Endgame. In Chapter One I mentioned Beckett's description of Act Without Words I as a kind of codicil to Endgame, a step further towards the last extremity, where the figure of a man is seen "thinking and stumbling and sweating, under our noses, like Clov about Hamm, but gone from refuge."^{1a} Although blind A and crippled B have not quite reached this stage of deprivation, they have "gone from refuge" - B has, unlike Hamm, learnt to propel himself with his stick. They are outside in the corpsed world, a wintry, grey, twilight world on a "sunless day."^{1b} A's observation - "It's the same stink everywhere"^{1c} - recalls Hamm's - "The whole world stinks of corpses."^{1d} Nature is dead, save "a little moss."^{1b} The only

^{1a} See note 15, p13 above.

^{1b} Endgame p66.

^{1c} Endgame p65

^{1d} Endgame p53.

food available is tinned, or else the lasting kind, like nuts. B's fantasy of a life together, growing potatoes and avoiding the "muckheap" they exist in, to reach the baked beans in the gutter, is just that, a fantasy, no more realistic than Hamm's vision of Flora, and other... mammals.

But although they are not confined by walls, their existence and perception are habit-bound, as Hamm's and Clov's are. A has Hamm's blindness, and therefore his reliance on familiar surroundings and objects, and on daily routine. His questions about the time of day show how unsure he is of time - as Pozzo says in Godot, the blind have no notion of time - yet he seeks details about the light and seasons that can mean nothing to a blind man. Although the question "What does my soul look like?"^{1e}

similar to the suggestion in Godot, that perhaps Pozzo "can see into the future",^{1f} conjures up the image of a blind seer or prophet, A's groping search for his possessions indicates that the blindness is merely a sense deprivation adding to the burden of Habit in his life. Like Clov, A has moments of awareness, but his attention can still be fixed on false hopes, such as baked beans or corned beef.

His dreary routine of existence is disturbed by the entry and questions of B. Their interaction can be described briefly as follows: B observes and reacts to A. He tries to persuade A to form a working and emotional relationship with him, based on their complementary

^{1e} Theatre I p65,

^{1f} Waiting for Godot p84.

abilities (or disabilities). A yields to the temptation of food (used by Hamm on Clov, Nagg and the beggar in Endgame) and makes a step towards dependence on B.

Irritated by A's actions and enthusiasm, B turns on him, after he has pried him loose from his familiar milieu.

There is some attempt at reconciliation, but it breaks down. B paints for A an intolerable picture of the cycle of deprivation he must undergo. The protection of Habit is shattered and A, in anguished awareness of his hopeless condition does what Clov could not do in Endgame, he breaks through the instincts of self-preservation, to deprive the character on whom he depends of his own life-support system (the pole, which enables him to move about).

B is an irritable, sensuous and pretentious bully, not at all unlike Hamm or Pozzo. He is selfish and requires continual reassurance - begged, as in so many plays, by the plea "Forgive me!" ^{1g}. Like Hamm, B has some pretensions to conscience, and awareness of the human species; his speech on the rags of human love ^{1h} is reminiscent of Hamm's last request to Clov. ¹ⁱ However, he does not hesitate to exercise tyranny as Hamm and Pozzo do. It is a futile tyranny, since not only does it lose him the friendship he needed, but it evokes retaliation from A.

Throughout the play, for all his pretensions, B is less aware of reality than A - or at least less willing to admit it. He spends most of his day in darkness - a retreat from awareness, as is made clear on p 64. He generally (or so he says) travels only a little distance from his familiar

^{1g} Theatre I p64. ^{1j} This is made clear on p64 of Theatre I.

^{1h} Theatre I p65.

¹ⁱ Endgame p50.

surroundings. We cannot place too much reliance, however on A and B appearing to be strangers to each other, when we consider that the same claim on the part of characters in Godot is open to serious question, and that the scene before us is clearly not the first episode of its type, for A, at least. His harp has gone; his violin, mouth organ and voice may very well go too. Life, as A realises from time to time when involuntary memories prompt him to awareness, is "moans and groans from the cradle to the grave"^{1k}. It has always been like this^{1l} and every day will be "a little more [unhappy]"^{1m}. He moons over Dora the way Krapp mooned over his past sensual experiences, but this memory does not protect him from the present. Neither as master and slave pair, nor as father and son, do A and B contrive to communicate effectively, or protect themselves against suffering consciousness.

A's final revolt is a far more decisive ending than is normally found in Beckett. Possibly the closest play to Theatre I in this respect, as in some others, is Act Without Words I, which ends like Theatre I in refusal to continue with the cruel deceptions of life. It is, however, a passive refusal, in the mime. Possibly A's action is no more final than Clov striking Hamm with the dog, but its position at the end of the play makes it much more powerful a response.

Finally, I will make some brief observations on the thematic purpose of certain linguistic devices in the play. As I noted in Chapter One, questioning illustrates

^{1k} Theatre I p64.

^{1l} Theatre I p62.

^{1m} Theatre I p63.

uncertainty and desire for the securely familiar; it can also indicate growing awareness and suffering. Exclamation marks give a seemingly trivial statement the force of a metaphysical assertion - "I'm not unhappy enough!" - "About turn! The vacant space!" (suggesting the surrounding void) - "I was always as I am [...]!" Comic dialogue, on the other hand, generally arises from a lack of understanding or communication. The ironic repetition of "poor wretch" shows that neither character has a proper awareness of his own condition. Habit has made that tolerable. A's insistent queries - "Your foot?", or "Baked beans?" - regardless of what point B's conversation has reached show a dogged perseverance in seeking out devices of self-preservation. Similarly, an ironic conjunction of words is used to make a mild swipe at God's dubious mercy by naming him, along with Women and Gambling, as a cause of downfall. ¹ⁿ

Less savage than Endgame, Theatre I is like Godot in having a surface layer of buoyant humour over a bleak portrayal of the human condition. It shows us an almost defunct universe, where man's existence is a grey region between life and death, with baked beans on the side, and a grim ending.

Theatre II was almost certainly written in 1958, during or shortly after Krapp's Last Tape, if Knowlson's dating of Krapp's Last Tape is correct,¹ and the latter was begun in February 1958. En Attendant Godot, Fin de Partie and Theatre II are the only stage plays that Beckett

1. Knowlson, p50

¹ⁿ Theatre I p62.

originally wrote in French. The French version was to appear in a special Beckett number of L'Herne, as Theatre 2², but Theatre II in Ends and Odds is the only English publication so far.

Theatre II is a formalized presentation of the pre-conditions of ending, in which two characters, A and B, examine whether or not a third, C, fulfils them. Meanwhile, C stands by a window opening out onto the darkness, several stories up, waiting for the summing up that will allow and force him to jump. A and B are inquisitors, called in to "finish him off", by bringing him to full awareness of himself and his condition. The image from Proust of Suffering opening a window on the real is dramatically conveyed by the symmetrical interior, opening via a window onto blackness, with the stage tension focussed on C standing motionless by the window. Beyond the window lies not the infinite grey of Endgame but the black night of annihilation. C stands, contemplating, one presumes, "the guilt of the past, the meaninglessness of the present and the death which lies in the future",³ since these are what A and B lay before him. Like the later figure of Henry in Embers, and Krapp in Krapp's Last Tape, C stands on the brink of nothingness, reviewing the past. Like Henry, C is a victim of his past experience - Zilliacus says in Beckett and Broadcasting that "Human encounters, Henry's experience tells him, imbue the self with a multitude of memories which it cannot control."⁴ A and B act as devices of memory carrying out the investigation. As Croak in Words and Music becomes the victim of his own mental processes, so C has put himself at the mercy of A and B, and has agreed to be subjected to "the opinion of others". All this may have been set up as an elaborate apparatus for precipitating C's jump, but he does not appear

2. Admussen, p72

3. Hesla, p113

4. Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting p93

to have retained any control over the characters (or possibly only sub-functions) A and B. Obviously, this is one stage play in which the internal dimension is very evident, and which in some respects prefigures Embers and the later radio plays.

Mayoux suggests that Krapp's Last Tape "fulfils the idea put forward in How It Is of disposing the sequences of a piece not chronologically but according to the most expressive arrangement".⁵ The sequences then work by contract and irony against each other. Theatre II works on a similar basis, with the juxtaposition of absurdly formalized "testimonies", and sharp, almost slap stick dialogue.

From these testimonies, interspersed with comments from A and B, we learn that the obstacles to ending, the feared "positive" elements which may weaken C's determination to jump, are hope in future events (symbolized by a lottery ticket), emotional commitment and response - fortunately for C, he had his "bit of cheddar" with the dairy-woman without emotional complications -, the procreative urge, joy, belief in the possibility of change for the better, unfulfilled commitments, a lingering hope of living to see the extermination of the species, and literary aspirations.

A and B conduct a formulaic investigation into whether C has had any of these. Lights and chairs arranged symmetrically emphasise the systematized framework of the investigation. The light and dark areas also indicate the distinction drawn in Krapp's Last Tape between the irrational, unconscious dark and the probing, rational, consciousness - rousing light. C's intention is to enter the dark. A and B, on the other hand, are almost incapable of moving in the dark, and create

5. Mayoux, Beckett, p35

oases of light in which to conduct their analysis, while C refrains from eye-contact with A and B, indicating a determined withdrawal from the rational intellect.

The lights fail A and B at a crucial moment, leading to an extremely comic episode. They are forced to dwell on the words "morbidly sensitive", only to find when the lights are finally restored, that the "sensitivity" lasted only a matter of minutes.

The humour throughout the play is reminiscent of the vaudeville-type wit found in Godot and Krapp's Last Tape. It is ironic and deflatory humour, undermining the apparent competence of A and B (for example when the papers - "Tied together like a cathedral" - scatter apart). As in most of the other plays, divine salvation is a joke. "God and man, so many disasters!"

In their comic fumbling, A and B are rather pathetic figures. When the light-failure gag is over, B demonstrates his need for "animal warmth."^{2a} He makes an advance to A but is rebuffed. The usual plea for reconciliation "Forgive me" - is made. A and B are, like Vladimir and Estragon, too dependent on each other to achieve true isolation and awareness; sentiment obstructs their consciousness. (Nagg, Nell, Clov and the toy dog threaten Hamm's isolated awareness in Endgame, in much the same manner). Here in Theatre II, A and B further demonstrate their lack of consciousness by their conversation about Mildred. Mildred is later used as the name of the fictional creature to whom Winnie attributes her own suffering in Happy Days. A and B are attempting a similar escape into the third person here.

The structure and action of Theatre II reflects above all, the bondage of A and B to Habit.

^{2a} Theatre II p72.

Images of Habit include the dog (the "dogshit" in Feckman's testimony recalls the proverb used in Proust of the dog chained by Habit to his vomit), the cat, and the routine feeding of it. The fact that C has been participating in this life-sustaining device somewhat undermines his credibility as a potential suicide. A and B consistently exercise the "animal instinct of self-preservation" ^{5a} even when they are aware of C's intention of breaking away from it; when A goes to the window to inspect C's face and has to lean out a little way, with his back to the void, B calls out -

B: Careful!

(Long pause, all three dead still) ^{5b}

During the pause all the implications of that "Careful" have time to sink in.

Arguments over trivial details and calculations, long passages describing trivia (such as the special features of the Time-symbolizing watch) and antiphonal dialogue between A and B are further illustrations of the all-pervading metaphor of Habit.

C seems, however, to have resisted most of its deadening influence. By the time of the summing-up, ^{5c} there is nothing to do but to "let him jump". But the "services" A and B offer are ultimately in vain, for a male songbird crowing at the death of the female - much as the man Smith did at the death of his wife - intrudes upon the silence. The birds (of whom C has a pathological horror) are closely related to Nagg and Nell in Endgame. Their food has run out, and the death of the female acts as an obstacle to the ending of C, just as the intrusion of sympathy brought by Hamm's parents were an obstacle to his ending. The birds are also symbols of "organic waste" that recall the squashed hen in All that Fall.

^{5a} Proust p11

^{5b} Theatre II p79

^{5c} Theatre II p80

A and B are profoundly disturbed by this death. Their safe, meticulously-organized existence is shaken up and they snap at each other and withdraw, whether in grief or some other emotion it is difficult to tell. The birdcage cloth is gently replaced as a shroud. The handkerchief raised "timidly" towards C's face might seem to be performing the same function, recalling the sudarium of Endgame,^{5d}

but there is room for ambiguity in this ending. It is possible that the handkerchief is held up to wipe tears from C's face indicating that C has succumbed to some emotional bondage, and has thus lost^{5e} his precious isolation, and any chance of ending his existence by suicide.

^{5d} Endgame p12 and p53.

^{5e} It was held this way in the 1978 Court Theatre production of Theatre II in Christchurch; that is, the handkerchief was draped around the actor's extended finger and hand, which was held out towards C's face.

INWARDS AND DOWNWARDS: THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN
THE RADIO PLAYS

Jean-Jacques Mayoux sees 1956 as "the year of a decisive and unexpected turning"¹ in the writing of Samuel Beckett - a development springing from entry into radio drama. The plays for radio possessed a new expressive power due to the "preliminary dissociation of the senses,"² required by the medium. In All that Fall, and even in Embers, a truly expressionistic play, visual images are built up by dialogues and sound effects, but these images are totally subordinate to, even questioned by, the auditory medium through which they are conveyed. "All that Fall," wrote Beckett, "is a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies [...]" whatever quality it may have [...] depends on the whole thing's coming out of the dark."³ I have discussed in Chapter One the extent to which the radio plays shared their themes and techniques with the novels rather than stage plays. However, as Esslin writes:

It is precisely the nature of the radio medium which makes possible the fusion of an external dramatic action (as distinct from the wholly internalized monologues of the narrative trilogy which followed

¹ Mayoux BECKETT p 34.

² Ibid.

³ Beckett's letter to his American Publisher in 1957, quoted by Zilliagus in the front of 'Beckett and Broadcasting' (Beckett's emphasis).

Watt) with its refraction and distortion in the mirror of a wholly subjective experience.⁴

In other words, the radio medium allows the writer to successfully dramatize the processes of the internal world in which the heroes of the novels struggled. The invisibility of a universe consisting only of sound-substance renders it totally subjective. The audience has no means of assessing or verifying reality other than by sound. Zilliacus supports J. J. Bloch's view that cinematic subjectivity is arrived at by equating "camera with hero"; radio subjectivity by equating "hero with microphone."⁵ Subjectivity is most evident in Embers, where the only existence we can be entirely sure of is Henry's own, and both Henry and the audience are victims of uncertainty regarding external and internal reality. Even in All that Fall, the most complex and realistic of the radio plays, the fact that physical presence is indicated by speech or sound effects alone allows for contradiction between Maddy's statements and the physical world she is in, emphasising the fictional nature of the soundscape (for example, All that Fall, p 75). Maddy tries to counter the non-presence of the unheard.

⁴ Esslin, "Samuel Beckett and the art of Broadcasting", p 40.

⁵ Zilliacus, p 55

Do not imagine, because I am silent, that
I am not present, and alive, to all that
is going on.^{5a}

But she cannot really succeed; the auditory medium is always working to undermine her existence and the existence of her surroundings, by focussing our attention on "the double role of Maddy's works when sounded."⁶

Maddy's rash efforts to communicate by language and be understood and perceived to exist, are slight when compared with Henry's struggle to speak and be heard, but they too represent a "futile attempt at 'reconciling' the two levels."⁷ These two levels present in every communication are 'information transmitted' and 'means of transmission.' The struggle is "forecast in the furious tussles of Texts for Nothing and The Unnamable."⁸ From "Text II" onwards, in the Stories and Texts for Nothing, the wrestle with words is quite clearly doomed to failure. Maddy flounders amid "hinnies", "jinnies", "barren" and "sterile" (All that Fall, p 86). Words have multiple meanings and ironic reflections; speakers are well aware of this and marvel at their own attempts at expression (for example, All that Fall, p 77) but as always in Beckett, words themselves are a barrier to real knowledge and perception.

⁶ Cleveland, p 268.

⁷ Breuer, p 230.

⁸ Mayoux, Beckett, p 57.

^{5a} All That Fall p61.

"Beckett's Proust," by John Pilling, discusses the types of barriers or screens between the self and the world which are found in Proust. He bases his conclusions about Beckett's interest in these on the markings in Beckett's text of Proust, as well as on the evidence of Beckett's writing. Proust was particularly interested in modern "screens" such as telephones and cameras.^{8a} For Beckett, the telephone call is

a coincidence of human voice and impersonal mechanism which reaches full fruition in the tape recorder of Krapp's Last Tape, the microphone voice of Not I, and the voices which throng the radio plays. Like Proust, he is prepared to encounter apparent deformations head on in an attempt to clarify the nature of the reality he is living through.^{8a}

Futhermore, Beckett scored and underlined a passage in Swann which seems relevant to the isolated heroes of Beckett's radio plays. Swann feels himself

transformé en une créature étrangère à l'humanité, aveugle, dépourvue de facultés logiques, presque une fantastique licorne, une créature chimérique ne percevant le

^{8a} Pilling "Beckett's Proust", p 19.

monde que par l'ouïe. Et comme dans la petite phrase il cherchait cependant un sens où son intelligence ne pouvait descendre, quelle étrange ivresse il avait à dépouiller son âme la plus intérieur de tous les secours du raisonnement et à la faire passer dans le coulier, dans le filtre obscur du son.⁹

Beckett's radio speakers suffer the same estrangement from the world and self as does the speaker in Texts for Nothing. Like the speaker in How It Is, they are removed from the voices they hear.¹⁰ How It Is uses images of "recordings on ebonite," and "megaphones."¹⁰ These mechanized recording functions are developed into seemingly separate identities in the radio plays. Mayoux notes that the device of mechanical recording allows "renewed immediacy of the past, the endless possibility of significant repetition, the dramatization, by contrasted presence, of the shifts in self-hood."¹¹ In Krapp's Last Tape the effect was gained by purely mechanical recording. In Embers, Beckett dramatizes those episodes from the past, while indicating that everything is really going on inside Henry's head.

⁹ Ibid, p 23.

¹⁰ Mayoux Beckett, p 27.

¹¹ Ibid.

From Embers onwards, the division of the self leaves a character listening to unrecognisable aspects of himself, or products of his own memories of human encounters.¹² As Beckett learnt from Proust, "the alien world begins with one's own body, so that the conscious personality is necessarily split."¹³ In Radio II, as we shall see later, the recording function itself is represented by a separate character. The progression from a large number of individuals, to one figure split into several faculties or aspects of himself, takes place in every area of Beckett's work, in the novels from Murphy to The Unnamable, in the stage plays from Eleutheria to Not I and That Time, and above all in the radio plays from All that Fall to Cascando and Radio II. Even in Murphy, "the only novel where Beckett still lets himself express a sensitive perception of externals"¹⁴ we find the three zones of Murphy's mind defined: "one of conflict in relation to the external world, one of autonomy and compensation [...], one a dark flux of forms."¹⁵

As I have mentioned above, the Stories and Texts for Nothing, which come at the beginning of that decade of writing for the stage when Beckett had all but given up prose, indicate the nature of the struggle in the artist's

¹² Zilliacus, p 96.

¹³ Mayoux Beckett p 4.

¹⁴ Ibid, p 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

mind that is later dramatized in the radio plays. They contain what Fahrenbach and Fletcher call "a progressive disintegration of the artist's personality, a composite on the one hand of the rational mind and of the creative poet on the other,"¹⁶ and the two are not compatible. As I showed in Chapter One, in Beckett's writing, reason and artistic inspiration are at cross-purposes in the human mind. In "Text VII" we see the "rational man doomed to observe his 'other half', that of the poet, from whom he feels successively more alienated: 'is that me still waiting there...?'"¹⁶ Copeland describes the artist's duality as the fact of his being "both the inner voice and the ear which harkens to that voice";¹⁷ there is tension and non-cooperation between the two. Beckett himself drew an important distinction in Proust:

The artist has acquired his text : the
artisan translates it.^{17a}

The interaction between different faculties and even the delineation of the role of each faculty differs from work to work. But the medium through which they battle is always the same: the story. Beckett is always dealing with the mental state and acts of the narrative artist, bound to use words to try and express his needs and perceptions. Of Embers, Alvarez says that it is

¹⁶ Fahrenbach and Fletcher, p 32.

¹⁷ Copeland, p 207.

^{17a} Proust p64.

"a condensed dramatic statement of the difficulties of being a writer,"¹⁸ If this is the nature of Embers, it is even more definitely the nature of Words and Music and Cascando, where there is far less delineation of character; the workings of the medium are laid even more bare, to expose the internal processes going through painful self-observation and creative effort. When hammered into shape by Croak, Words and Music bring the intolerable memory of past experience or encounters before him. He cannot halt them, only shuffle away from the poignant moment, leaving the two contributors unable to continue the creative process. Words and Music have equal and interdependent roles, though Music is quicker to perceive Croak's emotional crisis. In Proust, Beckett considered music to be the artistic medium closest to the non-material Ideal, and most capable of undistorted expression.

All that Fall, Embers and Words and Music were all written in English, with B.B.C. productions as immediate objectives.^{18a} Cascando, on the other hand, was commissioned for Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française and was written in French. Cascando gives up any pretensions to identifiable character and settings, concentrating entirely on the story-telling condition (in which the rush of words leaves no time for attention to meaning or points of the story). The Henry/Croak figure is reduced to a mere "Opener" who has an almost purely functional

¹⁸ Alayarez, p 119.

^{18a} Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p 116.

role. He merely "opens" and "closes" the processes, rather than directing them, and welcomes the approach of the end that comes nearer with every effort. Voice expresses the now familiar need and desire to hit on and complete the 'right' story, so that he can rest. We sense a past of continual self-deception: "... it's the right one... this time."^{18b}

One part of the mind, Opener, is compelled by a seemingly external force (external in the sense that it is outside himself and his own will) to perceive the others. Esslin suggests that the play may be viewed as a description of a perceptual process in which Music is "a wordless stream of emotion."¹⁹ Approximating the right story allows the drawing together of the split faculties, the approach of self-objectification for the perceiving mind in one's own story, and hence, an end. The search can be likened to the attempts of the narrator in "Text VI" of Stories and Texts for Nothing, who asks,

What is this unnamable thing, that I name
and name? ^{19a}

He cannot find a name to coincide with the thing's reality, just as Watt thought he could not satisfactorily name the "pot." If this narrator, or Voice (in Cascando), or the Unnamable, could cease his endless attempts to describe, tell and name, he would lose his existence as a voice (subject) and as a possible object of perception.

^{18b} Cascando p10.

¹⁹ Quoted in Zilliacus, p 139.

^{19a} Stories and Texts for Nothing p24.

Nothing would remain. I agree with Levy's statement that "Silence changes from something (or, rather nothing) out there to a hiatus in his [the Unnamable's] own being."²⁰ The same equation is made by Henry in Embers, where the succession of sounds, pauses and words that frame Henry's temporary escape into an internal fictional world, show the struggle between the silence, the sea, and the useless "waste" of words. Beckett's characters are always on the brink of silence, but none more so than Henry, whose situation is similar to Jung's description of the conscious mind as a vast series of islands and continents in the sea of the unconscious.²¹ The silence presses on Henry in the form of sound, but as Ada points out, underneath the surface, "all is as quiet as the grave. Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound." (Embers, p114). Henry's last words echo and affirm these lines. The silence represents the dark unconsciousness, and therefore non-existence, that is both feared and desired under the dual impulses to which the Beckettian character is subject. Embers and Krapp's Last Tape are plays in which characters spend their energy in defending themselves against it; in Cascando, they make gasping progress towards it. The idea of burrowing towards this stage, and the images associated with it, were discussed in Chapter One. In Embers, Henry seeks, not burial in the earth, but the insensate condition of the "stone", usually, in Beckett, to

²⁰ Levy, "Existence searching essence." p 117.

²¹ Jung, "The development of personality," p51, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1954.

be found by the seaside. Molloy collected his sucking stones there. Many characters (such as Woburn and the girl in Eh Joe) are envisaged falling or dying in the stones by the seaside. Extinction is thus identified with a return to mindless, passionless, material existence. The desire to reach this state is the basis for most of the concrete detail in Embers - the stones clashing, the hooves sounding, and the footsteps approaching and retreating from the water's edge.

Henry is unable to walk into the sea (Embers), p 110), just as Bolton could not gain the death for which he seemed to be pleading. The exercise of the artist's faculties and perception cannot be halted.

An interesting light is cast on the endless process of perception by Beckett's essay Proust. Vaudeville, says Beckett, "inaugurates the comedy of an exhaustive^{21a} enumeration." Hesla suggests that this ennumerative process is how Beckett resolves the difference between two strands of thought present in Proust - "Idealism", and the theory of the self as "fluid and changing" - hence impossible to grasp.²² The "exhaustive enumeration" method means, according to Hesla, cataloguing all the "actual (not possible) moments of the being of the self,"²² hence coming closer to the adequate objectification of the self," a goal I have already discussed in this chapter and in Chapter One. Using words, of course, the narrator can never arrive, just as Clov feared he would never arrive at his "impossible heap."

²² Hesla, p 54.

^{21a} Proust p92

I have discussed the concerns of the radio plays already known when Radio I and Radio II were published, in order to give some insight into the way Beckett used the medium of pure sound to depict the interactions between different mental faculties (almost, in some cases, factions) of the withdrawn, solitary artist. In Radio I and Radio II, the same themes and structuring of material are evident. Variations in the degree of realism and the type of characters or roles involved indicate the position, both thematic and chronological, which these plays occupy in the development of Beckett's radio drama. Moreover, Radio II provides us with some clear evidence of the directions Beckett was taking throughout his writing for stage and radio, as well as some interesting new aspects of the relationship between the artist's different faculties, and between the artist and the world of critics and broadcasting studios.

Radio I was, like Cascando, written in French, and was first published as Esquisse Radiophonique in Minuit 5 (1973) pp 31-35. Zilliacus devotes several pages to discussion of this text in Beckett and Broadcasting. He notes the existence of an eight-page holograph draft in the Theodore Besterman Samuel Beckett collection in McMaster University Library, Hamilton, Ontario.²³ The date at the top of page 1 reads "Ussy 29.11.61", while after "Fin" on the last page is "30.11.61".²³ According to Zilliacus, the first Cascando manuscript was written on

²³ Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p 120.

December 1, 1961,²³ the day after Beckett finished the Esquisse. An English translation of Esquisse Radio-phonique (titled Sketch for Radio Play) was published in Stereo Headphones - (Spring) pp 3-7.²⁴ This was published as Radio I in Ends and Odds.

The text of Radio I differs in several small details from that of the Esquisse. In the latter, Voix and Musique respond without delay to the commands of Elle for greater volume. In Radio I such demands are made in vain, indicating perhaps a further emphasis on the weakening of the mental powers involved. In the Esquisse, there was no sound of dialling - in fact the direction at that point reads "Aucun autre bruitage." From this Zilliacus infers that "the scene is a rest home, clinic, institution or the like."²⁵ However, a dialing sound is indicated in the directions for Radio I, so his inference would appear to be mistaken. The final point of difference is in the willingness of Lui or He to answer questions. Twice, in Radio I, She asks a question which He refuses to answer - "How many?"^{25a}

and "Is that a Turkoman?"^{25b} - but which He answers, vaguely and unhelpfully it is true, in the Esquisse. This alteration, like the first I mentioned, would seem to indicate that Beckett was concerned to make even clearer the uncommunicative and weakening condition of the figure "He."

The relationship between Radio I and Cascando is

²⁴ Admussen, p 66

²⁵ Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p 122

^{25a} Radio I p88.

^{25b} Radio I p89.

explored in some detail in Beckett and Broadcasting, where Zilliacus marshalls the evidence for considering the Esquisse as "a 'naturalist' precursor of Cascando"²⁶ ..

'naturalist' since it still has "the rudiments of a plot and a realistic decor, reinforced by a number of realistic details."²⁶ I do not propose to report here his examination of the seventeen Cascando variants; it will suffice to note that the earlier variants show even closer similarity to the Esquisse than did the final Cascando. In the earliest, the content of Voix and Musique is not specified, and there are elements obviously drawn from the Esquisse (such as references to letters and telephone calls) which are deleted in later versions. However, even the final Cascando text bears such close resemblance to Radio I that we cannot doubt that it derives from it, even without the evidence of dates. In both we find a character, withdrawn, isolated and non-communicative, turning on and off the weakening, disembodied processes of voice and music for which he has acquired a need, vainly demanding increasing in volume, marvelling at their drawing together as final silence comes closer and closer, and in his desperation using the phrases "Come on! Come on!" and "Good God" in exactly the same position relative to the sound of Voice and Music.

However, although Radio I contains less character and background delineation than does Words and Music, it does have more external detail than Cascando. In the latter, Opener has retreated so far inside himself that he is past making any attempt to communicate with the outside

²⁶ Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p 122.

world, and welcomes the approaching end "fervently." (p18).

In Radio I, the drawing together of Voice and Music (which is linked by the Cascando text with Molloy, p 9, where A and C unconsciously approach each other) is feared as a signal of the approaching end to transmission. It is interesting to note, however, that the union of words and music in the play Words and Music is a constructive one, rather than a symbol of the controlling faculty's imminent disintegration. The first manuscript of Cascando implies such a link with disintegration - "Les mouvants sont presque d'accord. Les morts, tout à fait."²⁷ - but the suggestion is removed in later texts. Discussion of the rapprochement and of volume control is reduced in these later texts to almost nothing, as Opener's mental awareness of the external world is cut away. Whereas He, in Radio I, freely identifies himself with the sounds and their gradual demise - "it's me...ME..." (p91) - Opener is unwilling to do so, though it is even more clear in Cascando that the sounds are "in his head" (Cascando, p 16). There is no clicking when Voice or Music begin their "live" transmission, and no "She" appears to turn on the perceptive faculty, or to comment on the condition of the central figure, although the radio medium leaves her existence in Radio I perhaps as much in doubt as was Ada's in Embers.

Like Ada, the woman in Radio I has only superficial interest in the He figure. Her exclamations are facile, and her attention easily distracted from the man's condition to the Persian rug. She claims that He asked her to come,

²⁷ Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting.

as Henry asked Ada. Like the old man in the poem of Words and Music, sitting shivering in the cold, waiting for the woman to bring in warmth, He receives her visit - but unwillingly, as payment for some debt. It is presumably the problems of language that make communication between them as impossible as love is for so many of Beckett's heroes. However, her comments on his condition - "How troubled you look !" (p87) - serve to make it quite clear that He is completely dependent on Voice and Music. The increasing fragmentation of these sounds and (an effect of the telephone device) of his own utterances - even his name "Mac-gilly-cuddy"²⁸ threaten his existence, just as the gradual loss of real and imagined companions threatened Henry's in Embers.

Indeed, in many respects, Radio I is closer to Embers than it is to Cascando; at least much in it is reminiscent of the earlier play. The whole Bolton/Holloway story is echoed in the two appeals. He makes for human companionship or help. During the first, the visit of She, He will not offer heat or light (neither did Bolton), nor will He acknowledge his trouble (as Bolton would not explain his to Holloway). The telephone link with the doctor and receptionist is still more tenuous and unsatisfactory. By then, his further withdrawal has been indicated by the curtains drawn against the world, as they are drawn in Embers and Eh Joe. It is an example of truly Beckettian

²⁸ The only other reference to such a name in Beckett's work that I could locate, is in More Pricks than Kicks where "the McGillycuddy woman" was named "without thinking, as an absurd suggestion for bridesmaid at the hero's wedding.

irony that the doctor cannot assist him because he is attending two births. We remember the pan-hysterectomy at nine in Embers, while a "breech" birth, like a hysterectomy, suggests the familiar unwillingness to be born.

Not only have his attempts to communicate with other human beings failed, but like Henry He has lost command over the volume of the sounds He turns on or conjures up. He reacts in a similar manner. "Good God!" he says. "Christ" and "Jesus!" exclaims Henry. The outcome of this failure is inevitable. As Ada told Henry,

"The time will come when no-one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers. You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours." (Embers, p 33)

The final words of Radio I recall what Henry says as he contemplates that "tomorrow" of complete isolation and silence. Henry checks his diary and finds "tomorrow... plumber at nine..ah yes, the waste...words," then, "nothing..all day all night nothing...not a sound." (Embers final page). For "waste", read "garbage", in Radio I, or "bilge" or "trash", in Words and Music or Cascando. The involuntary "dripping" of Hamm's creative faculty in Endgame has become, in the later radio plays, an involuntary subjection to the disembodied processes of Voice and Music, and the accumulation of "waste...words". In Radio I, we witness the "last ... gasps" (Radio I, 0 91) of the creative mind facing the silence. Cascando takes that mind a little further towards total isolation and withdrawal and gives narrative form to these "last gasps."

The first publishing of Radio II was in French, as Pochade Radiophonique in Minuit 16 (November 1975) pp2-12. Beckett's own dating in Minuit reads "années 60", but in view of the error he made in dating Theatre I at Theatre II at about the same time, this may also be incorrect. Admussen²⁹ says "My own dating for this play would be ca 1962", and the evidence of the plays written around the end of 1961 and the beginning of 1962 supports him. The tight progression from Words and Music to Cascando does not appear to leave room for a play of such different tone and complexity as Radio II.

Radio II was broadcast as Rough for Radio by the BBC, on April 13, 1976, to mark Beckett's seventieth birthday. It had the following cast: Harold Pinter as the Animator, Billie Whitelaw as the Stenographer, Patrick Magee as Fox, and Michael Deacon functioning as Dick. It was produced and directed by Martin Esslin, who subsequently wrote the article "Beckett's Rough for Radio",^{30a} the only article devoted to any of the plays in Odds, that I have as yet been able to locate.

Radio II has far more complexity of character, interaction, language and theme than do the radio plays which just precede it. It deals more plainly than anywhere else in the plays with the writer and his situation. Even the process of literary allusion is openly displayed, by the references to Sterne and Dante.³⁰

29. Admussen, p73

30. cf Esslin, "Beckett's Rough for Radio", p102

^{30a} Esslin's article is the only one devoted to any of the plays in Odds that I have as yet been able to locate.

Although very different on the surface from Words and Music, Radio I and Cascando Radio I is still closely related to them in the nature of the world it portrays, and the intensity with which it examines the problems of the artist. Like Esslin,³¹ I consider these four plays to be among the most explicit and therefore most significant of the works in which he deals with this area of experience - "experience of the creative process both as a quest for fulfillment and as a form of compulsion and slavery. In Rough for Radio [...] we have, I feel, the key for an understanding of much that is mysterious or difficult in Beckett's other works."³²

The textual differences between the French and English versions of Radio II result in slight differences in the characterization of the Animator (A) and Stenographer (S). Phrases such as "Verm~~n~~ in the Lingerie?" or "So Radiant! So Fleeting!!" (p95) are more pretentious than their French counterparts: "Une petite bête dans vos jolis dessous?" or "Si clair! Si bref!". Similarly, "my cup is full" is a little more flowing than "je suis ulcéré". In the English version, the contrast between the rather nauslatingly bright-and-breezy passages, and the nostalgic pretentiousness exhibited, for example, in the Sterne allusion other elements are added in the English text. The original French of the exhortations does not include the word "animal", although there are two lines of dialogue preceding them not found in the English.

31. Ibid, p103

32. Ibid.

D-Elles ne sont pastendres pourhous, monsieur.

A-Voyons ça.

In the phrase "Dick {unctioned?" (p97) the functional suggestion is present only in the English. Later on the same page, the phrase "crabbed youth", suggesting the familar birth-death conflation, is, in the French simply "Ah Jeunesse!"

The few other textual differences are very minor, and do not affect the tone or implications of the dialogue. However, the penultimate stage direction in Pochade Radiop. honique reads "Coup de crayon", indicating that the "Faint pencil" of the English text must be a repetition of the emphatic tap, rather than the sound of continued writing.

Radio II differs most of the other radio plays in arousing quite a degree of visual expectation regarding Fox's face, the Stenographer's figure and the Animators' age. A number of elements of a sensory environment are conjured up: warmth, glaring light from windows with the blinds raised, office equipment, office-worker type people, and a bull's pizzle whistling through the air at frequent intervals, though just how the sound of a bull's pizzle is to be distinguished from that of any other whip, I have no idea.

Within this environment we find some more complex characters than have been recently appearing in the radio plays. The central figure, of course, is the Animator, who exerts different types of control over the other three, in a complex pattern of master slave relationships. Similar to Pozzo, Hammand B in Theatre I, A is the sensuous, domineering, bullying interrogator, still dependent, like A and B in Theatre II, on human warmth. He uses the stock plea, "Forgive

me". His relationships with Fox has a hint of the critic-writer relationship too. A is satirically portrayed as "verbal, given to cliché, adept at literary allusion, proud of what he considers a poetic turn of phrase [...], and [...] philosophic".³³ He is the rational controller of the enquiry. With the aid of a recorder and goads he examines the different aspects of one existence somewhat as Old Krapp did with his tape recorder. S performs the recording function, and under A's direction falsifies the record to produce the right details, although she protests. According to Esslin, her "disrobing" and kissing of Fox is a metaphor for stimulating the subconscious with erotic fantasies.³⁴

Under A's direction, Fox is dragged out of his sense-deprived state to produce bursts of narrative as involuntary responses to the goads (pizzle, ruler, even the word "Dick"). He is exposed to the interrogative light of rational consciousness, like that in Play (begun in the same year as Radio II).

The gag is used because an extension of Mauthner's thinking brings A and S to the conclusion that what is not heard when said is lost forever.

In the allusion to Fritz Mauthner, the relevance of his ideas to the question of existence in the radio plays is implied, so I will expand on these ideas a little.

Pilling describes Mauthner's thoughts on perception and language in Samuel Beckett as follows:

If the I-consciousness, if individuality is seen to be but deception, then the very ground where

³³ Fletcher et al., A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p167. Guide, p167

³⁴ Esslin, "Beckett's Rough for Radio", p102

upon we stand trembles and our last hope for even a trace of world consciousness collapses. The subject disappears behind an object and we no longer detect any difference between the philosophical endeavour of eons of humanity and the dream existence of an amoeba. 35

36

In Mauthner's world, there is no God or metaphysics, and there can only be epistemology if its linguistic foundations stand up to analysis. And they don't. There can be no thinking without speech, and hence no distinction between the report and that which it is supposed to be a report of, so that we continually utter meaningless statements. We have to transcend the limits of language to know things as they really are and we can only articulate this through language, hence arriving at Beckett's "necessary failure" of the writer.

Fox is most unwilling to be dragged from his habit-drugged existence into the cruel glare of consciousness. Some of his first ramblings mention walls-here, as in Endgame, a symbol of encircling familiarity. A and S however, persevere in an interrogation that is a travesty of communication. Their aim is to suck Fox dry of his identity, real or imaginary, as it takes form in his rambling speech. His mention of being opened up, though it recalls the fixation with hysterectomy that seems to possess Beckett's pessimistic

35. Mauthner's major work is Contributions towards a Critique of Language

36. Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p25.

heroes, is also an image of what has actually happened to him. He was "opened up" at the start of the animation, and is being sucked dry.

A and S are not happy with the animal element in his speech. They, like Hanm, distinguish themselves from "the creatures", they reject the fauna, the mole, the fodient rodent tendencies of Fox. They seek evidence of human identify: the smile, tear, reference to love or evidence of secual relationship. They don't expect a Dante/Beatrice relationship. But Fox, the fodient rodent, has the burrowing instinct I discussed in chapter one. He wants to be left along in darkness, to "peterout in the stones" like the girl in Eh Joe. Like Henry, he longs for the stone-like state of complete passivity and sensory deprivation. Habit-bound, he clings to the Christian mythology, as A clings to his sentiment, as in the mistaken Sterne allusion. ³⁷

A's approach to art, or to getting something out of Fox, is anathema to the creative part of the mind. In a statement made in 1961, Beckett said that artistic form must "be of such a type that it admits the chaos. ³⁸ The art of A and S struggles to withholdness, impose form and identifiable characteristics on Fox. And like voice in Cascando, they deceive themselves that they will be able to, that is ossible, even dealing in language, to get the 'right' information, the 'right' story out of Fox.

In reality, their existence is Purgatorial.

37. Intristram Shandy, Vol VI, end of chapter, an accusing spirit catches an oath and bears it to heaven. The recording angel drops a tear when writing it down and blots it out forever. If anything, the passage satirizes rather than supports sentimentalism.

38. Bair, pp522-3

Purgatory in this play, is both past, like the Inferno that S has merely flipped through, and present, rather than future, as A would like to think. "There all sigh, I was, I was," says Fox (98) recalling the souls in the Purgatorio who looked back on their past life, rather than forward to Paradise.

In this dismal existence, the creative mind is goaded into life and interrogated, by the brash, bullying rational mind. We, as readers cannot but feel some interest and sympathy for Fox, even if his interior monologue is far from impressive. Fox's low vitality leads Esslin to say that the Artist is faced with a sluggish, sleepy and feeble creative core. 40

The ambiguous melding of characteristics from two worlds-the first, the artists mind, the second, the world of BBC production team complete with secretary and technician making demands on the hapless artist, or the learned pretentious critic, is really what makes Radio II such a brilliant and revealing example of the extent to which Beckett can use the radio medium.

40. Esslin, "Beckett's Rough for Radio" p99

In my discussion of Beckett's plays, I have shown the transition from the prose writing, up to 1950, to the stage plays of the next decade, to be a process of objectifying themes and experience, on the stage, to deal primarily with the external human condition.

I have shown how from 1956 onwards, the medium of radio opened up again for Beckett the internal world of the artist's warring impulses and faculties, to the extent that in 1960 he began substantial prose writing again with Comment C'est. Studied as members of the whole group of radio plays, from All That Fall onwards, Radio I and Radio II have contributed significantly to an understanding of where these internalizing impulses were leading Beckett's writing, and, indeed, of where they sprang from, in his own vision of artistic consciousness and the role of the creative artist.

The preceding three chapters make it quite clear that, of the four plays in Odds, three are very closely linked to particular works composed at about the same time. Specifically, Theatre I draws heavily on Endgame for its characterization and thematic material, also reflecting aspects of Waiting for Godot and Act Without Words I. Theatre II employs variations on the devices found in Krapp's Last Tape to examine the past and present of a single character. Its thematic use of light and darkness and its clownish comedy are obviously drawn from the same play. The preoccupation with ending, however, dates back to Endgame. Radio I is an antecedent of Cascando; it lies between Words and Music and Cascando as regards the contracting interior world of the solipsistic artist, but it also echoes a considerable amount of the material in Embers.

As far as these three plays are concerned, and although, particularly in the case of Theatre II, they do provide some new and interesting insights into Beckett's thinking, they reflect so closely the plays to which they were linked in composition, that Beckett was possibly not willing to let them stand as independent works soon after composition. Of course, Beckett regularly lifts material out of one work to use in another, not necessarily in the same genre. Seldom is the relationship as close as it is between, say, Theatre I and Endgame. Two other works which have provided considerable resources for later writing have been published only very recently or not at all. Mercier and Camier, much of which was used in Godot, only recently found its way into print, and Eleutheria, which provided material for Mercier and Camier, Waiting for Godot and even Play¹ is still unpublished.

It is more difficult to see why Beckett should have withheld publication of Radio II. Even though it uses the very familiar metaphor of master and slave as aspects of the divided mind, and unites most of the themes of the radio plays, much of it is original material and there are unexpected new developments in characterization.

I cannot really imagine Beckett unwilling to offend the producers and technicians of the BBC recording studios. I can however believe him unwilling to publish a play so autobiographical in tone and one that so clearly demands emotional responses from an audience used to having their judgement confused and undermined by Beckett's plays.

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Bair, p362.

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